

**Statement by Kyle Ward,**

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**Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division**

**Representative of the Secretary General**

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**1st Floor Conference Room, Palais Wilson, Geneva**

Mr. Chairperson,

Distinguished Members of the Committee against Torture,   
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, I would like to welcome you to the sixty-eighth session of the Committee against Torture. I would like to begin by welcoming, Dina Rossbacher, who joined the Human Rights Treaties Branch as the Chief of the Petitions Section at the beginning of October. Dina has extensive experience in OHCHR, most recently working in the Office of the Director for the Human Rights Council and Treaties Division. I wish her all the best in her important role.

Chairperson, Members of the Committee,

**The work of your Committee continues to be of crucial importance to our common efforts to combat torture**. As the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Andrew Gilmour, stated at a recent seminar organized by the Convention Against Torture Initiative, “contemporary challenges such as terrorism, organized crime, and irregular migration have given rise to trends aiming to trivialize torture, or to even justify such abuse as a “necessary evil” in exceptional circumstances”. He went on to stress that the Committee against Torture has consistently rejected the justification of torture as a means to avert “terrorist threats”, reminding that the Convention prohibits confessions extorted by torture of any person, without discrimination.

The continuing increase in the number of ratification is also a demonstration ofthe importance that Members States and other stakeholders attach to the Convention and your work. Let me in this connection welcome the fact that Angola became the 169th State Party to the Convention on 2 October 2019.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights Michele Bachelet has also repeatedly highlighted the role that your committee and other treaty bodies play in the protection of human rights. In her statement to the third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly on 15 October**, the High Commissioner underlined that “International human rights treaties, and jurisprudence by treaty bodies, constitute the legal backbone of the entire human rights protection architecture**. A stronger treaty body system would bolster all that we do as human rights actors – from the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), to expert and fact-finding bodies and capacity building work on national policies and laws”.

We are however facing various challenges in our efforts to ensure an efficient and effective treaty body system, including the current funding crisis confronting the United Nations system. The threat to cancel this and several other treaty body sessions was overcome, thanks in large part to the coordinated response from the chairs of treaty bodies, the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General. However, the **overall budget situation remains critical** as does the significant shortfall in staffing of the Human Rights Treaties Branch. The situation for 2020 and beyond – whether in relation to funding of sessions or staffing - is uncertain. In this regard, the Office is aware of the challenges facing this Committee, particularly in relation to petitions.

This only underscores the importance of seizing the opportunity of the 2020 Review to bring stability and adequate resourcing to the treaty body system.

Against this backdrop, as you know, **treaty body** **chairpersons adopted a common vision** at the annual meeting of Chairpersons. That meeting benefitted from a non-Paper coordinated by Costa Rica and endorsed by over 40 States. Both documents included the need to address the resource gap as a priority. They also highlighted the importance of closer engagement in regions and with regional mechanisms, and increased observance of reporting obligations by States, in addition to encouraging predictability and harmonization, as much as possible, among the treaty bodies.

The **High Commissioner has welcomed the vision of the Treaty Body Chairs** at the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, also highlighting the review as an opportunity to strengthen the impact of the Committee’s deliberations on the ground, including through streamlining and harmonizing procedures.

In the margins of the General Assembly 74th session, **three side events** were organized last month by the Human Rights Treaties Branch to increase awareness about the work of treaty bodies and the 2020 review by the General Assembly. At the side event on “Perspectives on the 2020 Treaty Bodies review” co-organised by the Permanent Missions of Costa Rica and Switzerland and the Geneva Academy, the Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, who is the current Chair of the annual meeting of Chairs, presented the vision of the Chairs for the 2020 review. The Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child also participated. The side event on “2020 and beyond: vision by the treaty body system” was organised by the Office as a Davos-style panel with the Chairs of the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture, the Committee on Migrant Workers, the Committee on Enforced Disappearances and your Committee. The Chairs set out their vision of 2020 and explained the current challenges, and proposed solutions. I am sure that your Chair will fully debrief you during the course of this session, and we look forward to further opportunities during your busy session to discuss the 2020 Review with you. The International Organization of the Francophonie co-organized with the Office a workshop to increase awareness among French-speaking delegations in New York on the 2020 review, previous reforms efforts and the way ahead. The Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination participated to give the perspective of the treaty body Chairs, together with the former Director of the Office who worked on the treaty body strengthening process.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The success of human rights bodies is rooted in dialogue with State Parties. But it also requires that individuals can freely cooperate with you and other bodies, including by bringing information about alleged human rights violations to your attention. In this respect, the global situation remains worrisome. **The tenth annual report of the Secretary-General on reprisals**, presented to the Human Rights Council in September, refers to a record number of 48 states with alleged cases of intimidation and reprisals of persons cooperating or seeking to cooperate with the United Nations on human rights. The reported cases range from acts of violence to disproportionate legal and policy restrictions and hostile public discourse. The report contains several cases pertaining to cooperation with your committee, suggesting that anti-torture work leads all-too-often to reprisals and also indicating the vigilance with which you have raised and addressed such cases. We look forward to further strengthening our common efforts in this area.

Before concluding, let me pay **tribute to the two Committee members leaving the Committee** at the end of this year, namely Ms. Gaer, who has spared no efforts to share her unique knowledge and experience as a Committee member since 2000, and Mr. Hani, who has brought in particular his experience as a human rights activist to the work of the Committee. We would like to thank you for the significant contributions you have made to the work of this committee and to the global efforts to eradicate torture.

I would like to wish you a successful and productive session.

Thank you.